

## Sue Eskierski



It was in the spring of 1982 when **Sue Eskierski** did something very few athletes from Norwalk have ever accomplished: *Win an NCAA championship.*

That's exactly what the former Norwalk High School three-sport standout did on May 31, 1982 as the starting third baseman for the UCLA women's softball team when the Bruins defeated Fresno State 2-0 in eight innings in Omaha, NE, to capture the national title.

In fact, Eskierski was a part of history as that was the very first women's softball tournament played under the umbrella of the National Collegiate Athletic Association. It would also be the first of UCLA's record 11 NCAA crowns.

The path to sunny southern California, however, began in Norwalk. Eskierski, who was born in Portchester, NY, moved to Norwalk when she was in second grade and began playing organized softball while in middle school for the Danbury Debs.

Eskierski then went on to play at Norwalk High School where she was a four-year starter and helped the Lady Bears win back-to-back FCIAC championships in 1978 and '79 while earning All-FCIAC First Team honors both years.

That 1978 NHS team her junior year finished 20-3 and advanced to the Class LL state final where it lost a 4-3 heartbreaker to Southington. The following year, Norwalk won its first 20 games but the Bears were upset by Amity 2-1 in the state semifinals, the only blemish on their sparkling 20-1 record.

Eskierski was an offensive machine that season, leading the city with 40 hits, 40 RBIs, and a .563 batting average, in addition to her outstanding defensive play at shortstop. She was also named to The Hour's first two All-City girls softball teams and as a senior was co-MVP with pitcher Lynn Luczkowski.

While those teams boasted several standout players, it was Luczkowski, a 2017 Norwalk Old Timers honoree, Eskierski, and her fellow 2018 honoree Steph Seymour who were the cornerstones that helped turn Norwalk High into a perennial FCIAC and state powerhouse in softball.

During her high school summers Eskierski played for another elite softball team, the Wilton Hawks. She helped the Hawks win the 1977 women's Class A fast pitch state championship and finish runner-up at the New England Regional. Then in '78, Eskierski and her teammates repeated as state champs, won the New England crown, and finished runner-up at the Nationals in Binghamton, NY. Eskierski went 3-for-3 with two RBIs in the national championship game.

She would join yet another powerhouse softball team in 1979. Her scholastic career was barely over when she was picked up by the defending world champion Raybestos Brakettes amateur softball team out of Stratford. One of only two Fairfield County players on the roster, Eskierski made her debut with the eight-time defending national champs a week before she graduated and would play five seasons with the Brakettes.

Recruited by a number of college programs, Eskierski decided to continue her career at the University of Rhode Island before transferring to UCLA, where she received a full scholarship. She switched from shortstop to third base and started three years for the Bruins. As a sophomore in 1981 she tied for the team lead in sacrifice hits with 15.

She helped UCLA go 38-10 that season and finish third in the country at the AIAW College World Series, the precursor to the NCAA women's softball tournament, which became a reality in 1982. That season the Bruins went 33-7-2, including 7-0 in the postseason to win the inaugural NCAA Women's College World Series.

Eskierski's senior year saw her team go 40-7, win the Western Collegiate Athletic Association (WCAA) championship, and finish third in the College World Series. In Eskierski's three varsity seasons, UCLA was 111-24-2 with a national championship and two third-place finishes.

Twelve years later, in 1995, Eskierski was inducted into the Connecticut Scholastic and Collegiate Softball Hall of Fame under the high school player category. Her former coach, Ray Barry, was enshrined the same night.

But softball wasn't the only sport the versatile Eskierski excelled in. In high school she also started four years on the NHS girls volleyball team, earning All-FCIAC First-Team honors as a junior and senior, the first two years all-conference teams were selected in volleyball. Eskierski was the only first-team repeater her senior year, making her the first two-time All-FCIAC first-team pick in league history.

She was also a four-year starting forward and a deadly outside shooter on the Norwalk girls basketball team. A double-figure scorer her final two seasons, Eskierski helped the Bears to a 19-0 regular season and the 1979 Western Division title her senior year. They finished runner-up in both the FCIAC and Class LL state tournament, the only losses in the Bears' brilliant 23-2 season.

One of her teammates that season was fellow 2018 Norwalk Old Timers honoree Steph Seymour while another senior starter was 2016 honoree Margaret Diaz. Lynn Luczkowski, a 2017 Old Timers honoree, came off the bench as a junior.

Eskierski was also named to The Hour's first two All-City girls basketball teams and as a senior was selected All-FCIAC West Division.

After her softball days at UCLA, Eskierski excelled in yet another sport as she remained in California and picked up golf. It wasn't long before she was playing on the Futures Golf Tour and upon moving back to Connecticut Eskierski won several tournaments at Oak Hills, including the women's club championship multiple times.

Now residing in Southbury, Eskierski owns her own gourmet pasta company, 'The Pasta Shop,' with stores in Southbury and New Milford.